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Wednesday, 27 April 2011, 4 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Osorio	(Colombia)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	India	Mr. Hardeep Sing Puri
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Nigeria	Mr. Amieyeofori
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: I appreciate the opportunity to brief the Council once again today on the situation in Syria.

We are following developments as closely as possible, and I base this briefing on reports from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other United Nations entities, published and confidential information from major international human rights and humanitarian organizations and a review of reputable media sources. We have also reviewed the official websites of the Government of Syria and social media sites of Syrian opposition groups.

Anti-Government demonstrations started in mid-March, following the detention of 15 school children in Dar'a for writing anti-Government graffiti. Those demonstrations have since gradually, but steadily, increased in geographic scope and participation. There are documented reports of protests in the coastal cities of Latakia, Baniyas and Jablah and the central cities of Homs and Hamah, the southern cities of Dar'a and Izra, the eastern city of Dayr Al-Zawar, the suburban towns around Damascus of Duma and Al-Moadamyeh and in the north-east in the cities of Al-Hasakak and Al-Qamishli. Demonstrations in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo have been sporadic and more limited. Protesters began with demands for greater freedom and political and economic reforms. They are increasingly calling for the downfall of the regime, echoing slogans that have been heard elsewhere in the region.

The Syrian authorities have reacted with a mix of reform measures and increasingly violent repression, which the Secretary-General has strongly condemned. In his speech to the Parliament on 30 March, President Al-Assad announced that a series of political, social and economic reforms would be undertaken to respond to demands of the Syrian people, including an investigation into the killings during protests. On 7 April, a presidential decree granted long-awaited citizenship to stateless Kurds residing in the north-east of the country. On 15 April, the President pledged to release all protest-related detainees, except those accused of committing crimes "against the nation and the citizens". Local officials were removed, and new ones appointed, in an apparent attempt to open dialogue with the population in Homs and Dar'a.

On 16 April, President Al-Assad swore in a new Government, which he tasked with developing reforms, including preparing new laws on media and political parties. In a series of decrees issued on 21 April, he lifted the state of emergency, which had been in place since 1963. He also abolished the High Security Court and recognized the right to peaceful protest while strictly regulating it. The next day, Friday, 22 April, witnessed the largest demonstration to date across the country, with demonstrators claiming that the measures taken were too little and too late. Despite the promise of reform, in fact, the Government crack-down intensified dramatically. OHCHR has information that more than 100 persons were killed in many towns across the country from Friday to Sunday. There is growing concern about the overall well-being of the population, including their access to medical care and services, and access to food and water in some cities.

Following the massive demonstration of Friday, 22 April, the Syrian army started a major military operation against Dar'a and surrounding villages. Tanks and large numbers of soldiers entered the area. Given the siege-like conditions, it is difficult to confirm our information. But reliable sources are consistently reporting the use of artillery fire against unarmed civilians, door-to-door arrest campaigns, the shooting of medical personnel who attempt to aid the wounded, raids against hospitals, clinics and mosques and the purposeful destruction of medical supplies and arrests of medical personnel.

The United Nations can confirm that electricity, communications systems and water in the city have been cut since at least Monday, and that as a result of those operations United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East schools and health facilities in Dar'a have been closed for the past week. There are reported shortages of medicine, water and food, and this could become a major humanitarian issue in the coming days.

The United Nations is requesting access to those areas to assess humanitarian needs and to provide an accurate first-hand account of developments.

I should also note that the land border between Syria and Jordan has been closed for much of the period of this ongoing military operation.

The towns of Duma and Al-Moadamyeh, in the vicinity of Damascus, are also surrounded by tanks and armed forces, as had been Baniyas earlier this month. There have been reports of security forces opening fire on demonstrators in the city of Djabla, killing at least 13 in the past couple of days. In Homs, security forces opened fire on demonstrators on 18 and 19 April, reportedly killing up to 20 people. Overall since mid-March, a review of reputable reports from media and human rights groups put the total number of anti-Government demonstrators killed by security forces and their supporters at more than 300, most likely between 350 and 400.

The High Commissioner's Office has also received information of wide-scale arrests of protesters, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and others. There are serious allegations of beatings and torture of people detained in connection with the protests, including children.

A review of the reports of the media, international human rights groups, United Nations agencies and diplomatic missions confirm that the overwhelming majority of protests have been peaceful and unarmed. However, there have been credible reports of a very few instances where protesters have used force, resulting in the deaths of members of the security forces.

Human Rights Watch has documented, with eyewitness testimony, only one such incident, on 8 April in Dar'a, when, after a number of protesters had been killed by live fire from the security forces, some demonstrators seized weapons from an abandoned checkpoint and opened fire, killing perhaps a dozen security personnel. There are no confirmed reports that this is a recurring phenomenon, nor do we have confirmation of reports of security personnel or soldiers being killed by Government agents. Some of the overall confusion on this sensitive issue may stem from the widely reported presence of armed security agents and regime supporters in civilian clothes.

The lack of transparency is compounded by the denial of access to the international and independent media, which, of course, violates freedom of the press and the right to information. The Committee to Protect Journalists and numerous other sources note that the Syrian authorities continue to detain journalists on a regular basis, disrupt Internet and telephone service, prohibit the entry of international journalists into the country, and block all access to areas of unrest. One cumulative effect of this policy is to prevent the collection and dissemination of accurate and impartial information, leaving observers unable to confirm or deny many allegations.

The official news agency, the Syrian Arab News Agency reported the death of at least 21 military and security personnel in recent days, and it alleged that more than 290 internal security officers had been injured since the beginning of the events. The Government has stated that most of the killings of civilians have been committed by anti-Government armed militias, but it has provided no evidence to date to support this.

Syrian television has also broadcast alleged confessions by detained protesters speaking of armed protesters and interference from abroad. The Syrian State media has also accused Lebanon's Future Movement of supplying arms to the protesters, which it has denied. We have no further information on those allegations.

The Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights have emphasized that all the killings during the demonstrations should be investigated, including the alleged killing of military and security officers. There will be a special session of the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in Syria in Geneva on Friday.

The regional implications of the situation in Syria are a source of concern in particular for its neighbours. In a press release dated 25 April, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States said that the League was

following the current developments in a number of Arab countries with great concern. It supported the growing popular aspiration in the Arab world for change, social modernization, the end of repression and a movement towards democratization and reform. It urged an immediate halt to violence against demonstrators, insisting that the people's demands for freedom and democracy deserved support, not bullets.

The statement also announced that the forthcoming meeting of the League of Arab States Ministers for Foreign Affairs will discuss the current dangerous situation between the people and their Governments in the Arab world. We also note the efforts made by the Government of Turkey to engage with Syrian interlocutors.

The Secretary-General is following the situation in Syria closely and with deep concern. As members are aware, he has issued three statements and spoken directly with President Al-Assad. The Secretary-General has condemned the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators and called for an independent, transparent and effective investigation into the killings. He has conveyed our belief that the Syrian authorities should fulfil their obligation to protect civilians and respect international human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as well as the freedom of the press.

Repression is not the solution. An inclusive dialogue and genuine reforms should address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, restore confidence and ensure social peace and order.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I should like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the deteriorating situation in Syria. The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the abhorrent violence used by the Government of Syria against its own people. My Government calls on President Al-Assad to change course now and heed the calls of his own people. We also call on the international community to respond to this brutal crackdown and to hold accountable those who are perpetrating these gross human rights violations.

The United States has expressed its position to the Syrian Government, and we are considering a range of options, including targeted sanctions, to respond to the outrageous and ongoing use of violence against peaceful protesters. We are particularly concerned about continued reports of gratuitous violence against unarmed demonstrators. I am pleased to note that the Human Rights Council decided this morning to hold a special session on the situation of human rights in Syria on Friday. The United States is one of the many supporters of this decision and believes the event to be an important and timely response given the horrific actions taking place. These brutal acts are those of neither a responsible Government nor a credible member of the international community.

Syrian Government actions up until now have not been serious responses to the demands of its people. Instead, the Syrian Government's violent repression of peaceful protesters is continuing. Casting blame on outsiders instead of addressing its own internal failures is no way for a Government to respond to legitimate calls for reform from its people.

Syrian security and military forces continue to attack civilian protesters, while the Government continues to seek Iranian assistance in repressing Syria's citizens through the same brutal tactics that have been used by the Iranian regime. The Syrian Government must stop the arbitrary arrest, detention and torture of civilians, especially journalists and activists. We call on the Syrian Government to allow the media, including foreign journalists, as well as human rights monitors, to verify events independently on the ground, which include reports of indiscriminate attacks on populated areas by Syrian forces.

The Syrian Government must acknowledge its people's legitimate calls for substantial and lasting reform. Words must be backed by actions to ensure real reform in Syria. The Syrian people's cries for freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and the ability to freely choose their leaders must be heeded.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I should like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing today. What we have heard from Mr. Pascoe is of grave concern to my Government. This is a moment of hope for many people across the Middle East and North Africa. Their voices are being heard as never before. New democratic processes are under way in Egypt and Tunisia, reflecting a long-pent-up desire for more open and representative government. Other Governments across the region are responding positively to the demand for reform.

In Syria, the Government has so far chosen a different path. What we have seen in recent weeks is a systematic attempt to stifle the legitimate demands of the Syrian people through violence and oppression. Despite the best efforts of the Syrian Government to bar access to international media and to suppress independent coverage of what is happening, we have witnessed the repeated and deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of tanks and other heavy weaponry against peaceful protestors.

Mr. Pascoe spoke of the 350 to 400 demonstrators killed by the security forces over the past few weeks. The Syrian army has imposed a siege on the city of Dar'a, including cutting all phone lines, water and electricity. The military is firing indiscriminately in the city itself. The security forces are also attacking several surrounding towns and suburbs of Damascus. We condemn utterly and without reservation the violence and killings perpetrated by the Syrian security forces against civilians, who are expressing their views in peaceful protests.

We now need to see four things. First, the violent repression must stop immediately. The Syrian Government has a responsibility to protect peaceful protestors, not to attack them. President Al-Assad must order his forces to show maximum restraint. The protestors themselves must ensure that their actions are peaceful.

Secondly, President Al-Assad's Government needs to respond to the legitimate demands of the Syrian people with immediate and genuine reform, not brutal repression. The emergency law should be lifted in practice. On 21 April, the Permanent Representative of Syria told the Security Council that legislation had been enacted recognizing the right to peaceful demonstration, but the reality on the ground stands in stark contrast to that commitment.

Thirdly, those responsible for the violence must be held to account. We strongly support the Secretary-General's call for an independent, transparent and effective investigation into the killings. The perpetrators of violence against civilians, and in particular those who have ordered it, must be brought to justice.

Fourthly, the international community needs to speak with one voice in condemning the violence in Syria. The United Kingdom is working intensively with its international partners to persuade the Syrian authorities to stop the violence and to respect the basic and universal human rights to freedom of expression and assembly. We will look at further measures with our European Union and other partners if the violence does not stop. That may include targeted financial and travel sanctions against those responsible for the violence, as well as their families and business interests.

Syria is at a fork in the road. Its Government can still choose to bring about the genuine reform that alone can provide peace and stability for Syria in the long term, or it can choose ever more violent repression, which can only bring short-term security for the authorities, but at a terrible cost to Syria's people and the country's future. We urge President Al-Assad to take the first course, which is the only way for Syria to regain its place at the heart of the Middle East.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing to the Council on the situation in Syria, which has further heightened the concerns of its members.

I would like to express, before the Council, France's deep concern at the violent actions of the Syrian authorities against civilian demonstrators. We unreservedly condemn such unacceptable brutality, which has already caused not only hundreds of deaths among Syrian civilians, but also numerous disappearances of demonstrators, journalists and human rights activists. For the past three days, Dar'a has been a city besieged by the Syrian army, deprived of water, electricity and contact with outside world, surrounded by tanks and threatened with heavy artillery.

The memories of the bloody massacres of the civilian population in Syria in the early 1980s, in particular in Hama, are too painful for the international community to silently stand by in the face of escalating repression. Today, the Council must send a clear message to the Syrian authorities that this indiscriminate and brutal repression must stop immediately. The Syrian authorities must respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the country's citizens, particularly the right of peaceful protest and freedom of the press. The arbitrary arrests must stop, as must the restrictions being imposed on the media.

We call on the Syrian authorities to immediately release prisoners of conscience. We support the

Secretary-General's appeal for an independent, transparent and effective investigation into the crimes that have been committed. Those who ordered and perpetrated those acts should be held accountable for their actions.

Only reforms responding to the legitimate aspirations of the population will help to preserve the country's stability, which is in the interest of all. Syria plays a decisive role in regional stability. However, at this stage, we cannot help noting that the lifting of the state of emergency and other reforms announced by the President have been followed by a contradictory upsurge in violence. The Syrian people's call for freedom, democracy and respect for their universal rights must be heard by the Syrian authorities or, failing that, by the Security Council.

If no positive developments unfold, France and other countries will review a wide range of alternatives for increasing pressure on the Syrian regime to stop the repression and take steps towards reform. Strong measures must be taken if these calls go unheeded. The Human Rights Council is also seized of the matter, and we trust that it will adopt a resolution at the close of its special session on Friday.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): We, too, join in thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the unfolding situation in Syria, about which South Africa is very concerned. We regret the loss of life in Syria and call on all parties to the conflict to show restraint. We welcome the lifting of the state of emergency, which had been in place for almost 50 years. We also welcome the adoption of other reforms introduced by the Syrian authorities over the past few days. We urge the Government of Syria to move swiftly to implement the necessary reforms towards democratization, in accordance with the will and aspirations of its people.

The voices of people in Syria and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa cannot be ignored. It is important for their Governments to ensure that the rights of their people are protected and that they be allowed to voice their grievances peacefully. Syria is integral to a wider resolution of the Middle East conflict; its stability is linked to that of its neighbours.

Finally, we urge the Syrian authorities to initiate an open, transparent and all-inclusive process with their people in order to address their grievances and, in turn, guarantee their fundamental political rights and freedoms, including their rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): We are grateful to you, Sir, for having convened this very timely meeting. Let me also thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. The information that he gave us is deeply worrying. The Council must urgently discuss the situation in Syria. The scale of the violence and brutality used for internal repression is deeply disturbing. What is more, the situation has obvious regional and international implications, given Syria's critical importance to peace and security in the Middle East, including being host to a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

The briefing that we heard and the facts on the ground have shown that the Syrian authorities are using violence against peaceful demonstrators. We are deeply shocked by the deaths of civilians who were killed because they tried to exercise their fundamental rights. The systematic use of force by deploying tanks and using live ammunition comes from the Syrian authorities. The demonstrators do not have tanks. They do not arrest people arbitrarily. They do not curtail journalists in their reporting.

The continued violence against peaceful protesters is completely unacceptable. It has to stop immediately. All announcements of reforms are undermined by the ongoing violence. The reports we have received from Dar'a are deeply disturbing. Tanks and artillery have been deployed. There have been many casualties. It is impossible to access the area. We demand access for international observers. Those responsible for the killings should be held accountable.

In this connection, we strongly support the Secretary-General's call for an independent, transparent and effective investigation into the killings. The Syrian authorities must respect human rights, including the right to peaceful assembly, as well as freedom of opinion and of the press. We also call on the Syrian authorities to respect the obligation to safeguard the integrity and dignity of all detainees and their right to a fair legal process.

The Syrian Government now has a choice to end the violence and initiate the tangible and meaningful reforms that are needed, or to continue with ever more violent repression. Choosing the latter would be a very short-sighted approach and would require us to react

with the appropriate measures. Ongoing repression is not a solution.

Germany has so far taken up a number of diplomatic and political initiatives. We have strongly supported a special session on Syria at the Human Rights Council, and welcome the fact that it will take place this Friday. Together with our partners, we will consider action at the level of the European Union before the end of the week. This might include sanctions.

Mr. Pankin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Like other members of the Security Council, the Russian Federation views with great concern the increasing tension and manifestations of confrontation in Syria, which are claiming victims and causing suffering among the demonstrators, law enforcement personnel and the army. We expect the Syrian authorities to conduct a transparent and effective investigation of all such cases and the guilty to be brought to justice.

The dangerous deterioration of the situation requires a careful, tried and tested approach. What can be done to help resolve the situation rather than cause further harm?

Clearly, the process of democratic reforms proclaimed and being earnestly implemented by the leadership of Syria is worthy of support. A great many significant steps have been taken in a very short period of time. A presidential decree has been signed, lifting the state of emergency in the country. The issue of granting citizenship to a large section of the population has been resolved. Preparations are under way for the upcoming special parliamentary session to adopt laws on demonstrations, political parties, local Government and the media. Measures are being elaborated to step up the fight against corruption, unemployment and the development of rural areas of the country.

The search for fair solutions to persistent problems must be carried out by the Government alongside all social, political and religious forces in a constitutional manner, and the sooner the better. Violence, regardless of what side the perpetrators are from, must be avoided. It is only through constructive dialogue on the implementation of announced political reforms and socio-economic change that stability and democratic development in Syria in the interests of all its citizens will occur.

The main thing, in our view, is that the current situation in Syria, despite increasing tension and confrontations, does not present a threat to international peace and security. One cannot disregard the fact that the violence does not originate entirely from one side. Inter alia, an army column was fired upon on the Latakia-Tartus road, and there have been armed attacks on military facilities and posts and the killing of police personnel followed by the abuse and desecration of their bodies.

A real threat to regional security, in our view, could arise from outside interference in Syria's domestic situation, including attempts to promote ready-made solutions or to take sides. It is increasingly clear that some demonstrators, both in Syria and other countries, hope that the deteriorating situation could force the international community to help them and to take sides. Such approaches lead to an endless cycle of violence and represent an invitation to civil war. It is extremely important to focus all efforts on avoiding such a dangerous turn of events, especially as Syria is the cornerstone of the Middle East security architecture. Destabilizing that significant link in the chain will lead to complications throughout the region.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

China is closely following the unfolding situation in Syria. Syria is an important country in the Middle East. We hope that the various parties there will resolve their differences through political dialogue and address the current crisis in an appropriate manner, so as to maintain stability and order in the country.

We welcome the fact that the Government of Syria recently lifted the state of emergency and announced political reforms and the launch of national dialogue. It has also decided to investigate all recent incidents. We hope that these measures will help to promote the achievement of the aforementioned objectives.

The turbulence in some countries in the Middle East and North Africa is a matter of deep concern. It has not only had a negative impact on peace and stability in these countries, but has also significantly undermined stability of the region. How to address

these issues is a common challenge that we all face. It is also a common task, because if these issues are not addressed appropriately, they will threaten peace and stability in other regions and have a significant negative impact on the recovery of the world economy.

Therefore, with regard to the events that have taken place in these countries, we hope that the international community will offer constructive help in line with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in Syria.

Syria has, historically and in contemporary times, been an important country in the Middle East. Its role in the Middle East peace process and in the stability of the wider region cannot be overemphasized. Thus, prolonged instability or unrest in Syria may have ramifications for the region and beyond.

Reports of violence during the recent demonstrations in parts of Syria, resulting in the deaths of several demonstrators and security personnel, are of concern. There have been reports of armed extremist elements mingling with the demonstrators and using the demonstrations to attack security personnel and damage Government property, and there is an apparent lack of information regarding those responsible for those violent attacks.

We have noted that Syria has appointed a commission of inquiry into the violence during the demonstrations and announced various measures to address the grievances of its people, including the lifting of emergency laws, the abolition of State security courts, the transfer of investigative powers to the police, and so on. The Government has also announced procedures for organizing peaceful demonstrations. We hope that these measures, initiated by the Syrian Government as part of an inclusive process of political dialogue and reform, will initiate the process of meeting the aspirations of all sections of Syrian society.

As we deplore any violence from any quarter, the Council needs to make clear that it is the responsibility of sovereign States to respond to the aspirations of their people through administrative, political, economic and other measures. At the same time, it is for States to decide on the best course of action to maintain internal law and order and to prevent violence. The primary responsibility of the Council in this particular instance is to urge all sides to abjure violence in any form and to seek a resolution of grievances through peaceful means.

We believe that regional and subregional organizations have an important role to play in resolving the crisis in the region, including in Syria. It is essential that all efforts be made to de-escalate tensions rather than to exacerbate them. My delegation would support all measures designed to end violence and restore peace.

Mr. Messone (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Like other delegations, Gabon wishes to express its deep concerns regarding the alarming situation in Syria. Gabon welcomes the lifting of the state of emergency and other measures taken by the Syrian authorities. However, we urge those authorities to put an immediate end to the ongoing repression of peaceful demonstrations and to investigate such human rights violations.

My country stresses the need to respect international humanitarian law in the face of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation described by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe. My delegation urges the Government of Syria to take concrete measures for deep-rooted reform to meet the aspirations of its people. We also urge the authorities to ensure the protection of civilians during law enforcement operations.

Gabon, attached to inclusive political dialogue as a bulwark of peace, urges the authorities in Syria to establish recognized mechanisms that take into account the legitimate aspirations of the people to lasting peace and stability. That is why we welcome the upcoming meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the League of Arab States on 8 May.

Finally, we urge all regional actors to support efforts to establish dialogue to put an end to the current cycle of demonstrations and repression.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing. Basic freedoms must be upheld in all contexts. That must be the coherent message of this Council and the international community in responding to the challenges posed by the historic changes in the Arab world. Brazil stands in solidarity with those demonstrating peacefully for

more political participation, improved economic opportunities, freedom and dignity.

We express concern at the current escalation of violence in Syria. We condemn the use of force against unarmed demonstrators wherever it occurs. We hope that the crisis can be addressed through dialogue. The legitimate aspirations of the populations in the Arab world must be addressed through inclusive political processes, and not by military means. At this stage, further repression is likely only to produce more protests and dissent. We expect the Syrian leadership to pursue the path of dialogue and reform as the most effective way to de-escalate the situation.

We note efforts at reform made by the Syrian Government. The lifting of the state of emergency and other concrete legislative measures are encouraging steps to address the legitimate aspirations of the population. We expect such measures to be implemented without delay. We take this opportunity to encourage the Syrian Government to engage in a broad, inclusive political dialogue with all relevant parties. Reform, not repression, is the way forward.

Regional organizations have a crucial contribution to make in forging political solutions with real chances of succeeding and leading to peaceful transformation. In this connection, I would like to underscore the vital role of the League of Arab States in encouraging steps in the right direction.

We are all well aware of the importance of stability in Syria to the overall stability of the Middle East. Syria being so central to regional stability, it is all the more relevant that reforms and meaningful dialogue be fostered there in a peaceful and stable environment, as free as possible from tensions and outside pressures.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to start by thanking Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I recall that the links between Lebanon and Syria transcend those of mere good-neighbourliness. That is why the Taif Agreement, which is the foundation of Lebanon's Constitution, stipulates that Lebanon, Arab in its identity, is linked by sincere fraternal relations with all Arab States and has special relations with Syria that draw their strength from history and common fraternal interests. Coordination and cooperation between the two countries are based on those principles.

The security of Lebanon is bound up with that of Syria, and vice versa. What takes place in Lebanon affects Syria, and what takes place in Syria affects Lebanon. History has demonstrated that fact most convincingly. In referring to developments in Syria, President of the Republic Michel Sleiman expressed very clearly that Lebanon supported stability in Syria and the wider Arab world, but most especially in Syria because the security of both countries is linked, as we are all aware. Lebanon also supports Syria's leadership in its decision to initiate reforms, lift the state of emergency and the law on political parties, and take other measures.

Lebanon recognizes the fact that the calls for reform are correct and justified. Today, more than ever, the hearts and minds of all Lebanese people stand in support of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, its people and the safety and security of its children. In Lebanon, we know better than anyone else how central Syria's role has been throughout history. We regret the deaths of the victims. We extend our condolences to their families and hope that Syria will enjoy peace and progress.

Mr. Amieyeofori (Nigeria): I, too, would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive and insightful briefing on the situation in Syria.

Nigeria shares the concerns of most delegations on the widespread violence that has engulfed Syria since late March and led to hundreds of deaths and injuries. We call for an end to the violence and bloodshed and urge all the parties to maintain calm and restraint.

In these circumstances, we want to reiterate the importance of the protection of civilians, respect for human rights and the need to uphold the right to peaceful assembly. The lifting of the 48-year old emergency law and the programme of reforms announced by the Government, although long overdue, are steps in the right direction. We therefore encourage the Government of Syria to consolidate this process and to swiftly implement these measures.

In our view, resolving the Syrian crisis, as most speakers have noted, requires some measure of caution, as this crisis could negatively affect regional peace and security.

Finally, we call for an inclusive dialogue and genuine reforms that address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the Syrian people, including a democratization process that will promote peace and stability in the country. In this regard, we welcome the statement issued by the League of Arab States. Our view is that the Arab League has an important role to play in the efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis. We urge the Syrian authorities to provide access for international aid and assistance to those in need of care and drugs in order to halt the deteriorating situation in the country.

Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, allow me to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for providing us with the briefing on recent developments in Syria.

Bosnia and Herzegovina expresses its deep concern with regard to the situation in Syria and its regret over the loss of life and the high number of injuries. We offer our most sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who have lost their lives. We also join others today in condemnation of the ongoing violence which must stop immediately. All those responsible for these crimes must be brought to justice and held accountable for their actions.

We take note of the lifting of the state of emergency and of the programme of reforms announced by President Al-Assad. We share the view of the Secretary-General that the effective implementation of reforms is necessary to address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and ensure social peace and order in Syria. Moreover, it is our strong belief that the aspirations and demands of the people should be addressed through an inclusive and meaningful Syrian-led ballot.

In conclusion, Syria's critical importance to the peace and security of the Middle East cannot be overstressed. Therefore, while fully supporting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, we strongly believe that the aspirations and demands of the people should be addressed through an inclusive and meaningful Syrian–led ballot.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Dramatic events in the region are quickly changing the face of the Middle East. Like those elsewhere in the region, people in Syria are demanding freedom, democracy and reform. The one and only way to respond to such legitimate aspirations is through genuine and inclusive dialogue. Violence and repression can never be the answer.

Portugal is gravely concerned about the situation in Syria and the increasing levels of violence resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries. We extend our condolences to the families of all the victims. We strongly condemn the violence against peaceful demonstrators and call for an immediate end to the violence and for those responsible to be held accountable. We support the Secretary-General's call for an independent, transparent and effective investigation into the killings.

Portugal takes note of the Syrian Government's decision to lift the state of emergency, of the laws introduced over the past few days, and of the announced intention to proceed with political reform. These measures and intentions must nevertheless be credible, carried out in an effective way and translate into real improvements and effective reform. Syrian authorities have an obligation to respect human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as well as freedom of the press, and to respect the integrity and dignity of arrested persons and their right to due legal process.

My country is mindful of Syria's critical importance to the peace and security of the Middle East. We also remain fully committed to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. Portugal welcomes and supports the statement issued by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States on the current developments in an increasing number of Arab cities, its appeal to Governments to commit to an immediate implementation of reform, and the forthcoming meeting of the League's Foreign Ministers.

Portugal calls once again upon the Government to Syria to show all possible restraint and to ensure the protection of its citizens. We call upon all parties in Syria to engage in a genuine, comprehensive and inclusive dialogue and to embark on an inclusive and sustainable reform process.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Colombia.

We have taken careful note of the briefing of Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe, for which we thank him.

Colombia expresses its concern over the deterioration of the situation in Syria and deplores the violent repression to which demonstrators have been subject, as well as the deaths of many civilians. We believe that it is unacceptable to use disproportionate force against the civilian population and therefore call for the immediate cessation of all acts of violence as an indispensable element of a solution to the crisis.

It is the responsibility of the Syrian Government to respect and protect the individual freedoms and fundamental rights of the entire population. In order to restore peace and order, the Government must guarantee all citizens the right to life and the full exercise of their freedom of expression and right to peaceful assembly, in strict compliance with its international obligations and the provisions of international human rights law.

We note the lifting of the state of emergency and the programme of reforms announced by President Bashar al-Assad, and hope that, through an inclusive dialogue and the effective application of these reforms, progress can be made towards social peace and order.

Colombia urges the civil authorities and the demonstrators to find a way to build channels of social and political dialogue that respond effectively to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to a just, equitable and democratic society in which citizens can freely exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms. Colombia reiterates the urgent need to end the violence and calls strongly for the respect of human rights of Syrian citizens. We look forward to an independent and transparent investigation into the killings, and support initiatives to find a political solution that will bring the parties closer together and contribute to an end to the violence.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): More than six weeks have passed since the onset of acts of violence perpetrated by extremist groups whose fundamental goal is clearly the fall of the Syrian Government. Throughout this time, law enforcement authorities have exercised the utmost restraint, in order to avoid the killing of innocent civilians. However, those groups, which included armed criminal elements, have continued to kill innocent citizens and many members of the security forces, as well as to attack Government facilities and army and law enforcement installations.

As the Security Council is aware, the Government has taken many measures in response to legitimate popular demands, including the lifting of the state of emergency, the abolition of the High Security Court and the issuance, for the first time in Syria's history, of a legislative decree on peaceful demonstrations. Measures have also been taken to combat corruption and to respond to popular demands on issues related to the daily lives of Syrian citizens. Moreover, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that there will be further measures by the Government to bolster reform in the country, following calls from several members of the Council.

Rather than backing down in the light of the reform measures taken by the Syrian leadership, regrettably, the parties behind the demonstrations have responded with further attacks against army positions and by destroying security installations, killing many security personnel, mutilating corpses, raising slogans of incitement and burning private and public establishments. I have here with me the names of 51 members of the armed forces who were killed by these armed gangs. The list includes the names of both soldiers and officers. I would be happy to provide copies to anyone who would like one.

In response to popular demands, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic has met with delegations from every province in the country in order to respond directly to citizen complaints and demands. The President has issued instructions to respond to all legitimate demands, including investigating all acts of killing and declaring that all civilian and military casualties are to be considered as martyrs.

Faced with these initiatives of openness by the State and its institutions, those who are attempting to undermine Syria have tried to exploit the positive environment in order to erode the country's security and stability by blocking roads, threatening citizens, forcing schools and Government institutions to close and continuing to carry out acts that run counter to the interests of citizens, their security and their ability to live normal lives throughout the country.

That campaign within Syria has gone hand-in-hand with an unprecedented media campaign in the region against Syria and its national and Arab policies. There has been incitement to terrorism and sabotage. Doubts have been sown as to the Government's intent. In many cases, facts have been turned on their heads. Demonstrators have been incited to burn State property and raise doubt about its position on events. There has been encouragement to acts of violence and justification for it, in an attempt to make the Government's reform efforts null and void. There have also been fatwas from beyond our borders, calling for opposition to authority and State institutions.

That campaign has been accompanied by information confirming that official parties outside the country have been financing and responsible for inciting acts of sabotage against Syria, its people and its leadership. For example, let me refer to an article in the *Washington Post* dated Monday, 18 April, which states that, since 2006, the State Department has provided up to $6 million to several Syrian opposition figures to run a satellite television station called Barada, which is headquartered in London. In addition, since 2005, the United States Administration has provided financial support to Syrian opposition figures. All of this is part of a long-term campaign that, according to the *Washington Post*, "is aimed at the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad. To complete the picture of this conspiracy against my country, allow me to refer the Council to the statement made to a number of media outlets by a Syrian opposition figure living in France, namely, that he had received offers from three foreign parties to bring weapons into Syria.

These actions have had a negative impact on our national economy. Markets are stalled. Tourism has come to a halt. Investment is down. All of this is part of an effort to heighten instability in as many Syrian cities and villages as possible.

The authorities, within the responsibility that they have to protect Syria and its borders with neighbouring countries, have stopped many arms shipments that had been sent to groups attempting to undermine stability and security in the country. It has been proved that those weapons were sent from overseas by extremist religious groups to their agents inside the country with the goal of killing innocent people, burning public and private institutions and, in general, causing chaos in the country. It was natural, under such circumstances, for the State to undertake to fulfil — just as would any other State facing such threats and dangers — its fundamental responsibility to respond to the calls of its citizens, who had been enjoying peace and security.

The Syrian leadership is convinced that such extremist circles do not want reform; they want to overthrow the Government through killing and chaos. It was thus natural for the Syrian leadership to respond to the appeals of its citizens that it save them from the actions of such terrorist extremist groups and to restore order to the country. That is exactly what happened in the city of Dar'a, which Mr. Pascoe mentioned earlier. Security forces found large numbers of sophisticated weapons, including machine guns and advanced communications equipment. The operation also led to the detention of a large number of members of those extremist groups that have been sowing terror and death; other groups managed to escape outside the province. The detainees have admitted to their crimes and to the fact that they had received large sums of money for their acts, which the State can neither accept nor justify.

Syria sees no justification for a debate on this issue in the Security Council. We view with grave suspicion the attempts made by some to give the impression that the Syrian State does not protect its people. While armed groups have committed acts of killing and destruction, as I have stated, let me stress that no one has the right to protect, or even hint at protecting, such groups. The Syrian State is defending its people. It is saving them from the seditious plots being hatched by Syria's enemies in an attempt to undermine its security and independence. It is rejecting the massive political pressure brought to bear by some from outside the country to change national policies that serve the interests of the people and the nation.

In order to safeguard the rights of all Syrian citizens, a judicial commission has been set up to investigate all cases involving losses of life among civilians and military personnel, which are regrettable, as a result of the latest clashes.

The falling of even one victim from my Government, which we regret, is too high a price to pay. As a Government, we cannot accept that some claim to value the lives of our sons more than we do. Policies of interference in the affairs of other States on the basis of various pretexts and justifications have always proved to be erroneous. We believe that some of the statements we have heard today against Syria

can only be considered an encouragement to extremism and terrorism. The price will be paid by innocents in Syria and the rest of the world. Stability and peace in the region will also pay a price.

We cannot be convinced that the convening of such meetings serves the interests of the Syrian people, even as it is interpreted by extremist groups as international support for them and their wrongful practices.

We reaffirm that the age of colonialism has passed. All the peoples of the world are now aware of the new methods used by some States to interfere in the affairs of other States, be it in the framework of the so-called responsibility to protect or that of humanitarian intervention, which have been rejected by all developing countries, even as attempts are being made to ram them through international forums, including the United Nations. We have always feared that the use of such lofty concepts would undermine the unity, sovereignty and independence of the peoples of the developing countries.

Syria stresses that what is happening on the ground can in no way be considered peaceful demonstrations. Otherwise, how could so many martyrs have fallen among our security forces, our army and our innocent civilians? Syria also stresses that it will move forward on the road of reform, as announced by the President of the Syrian Arab Republic. We will continue to satisfy the legitimate demands of our citizens; we will continue to protect their lives and property. We will not allow terrorism or extremism to kill our people.

The attempt by some members of the Security Council, with unprecedented enthusiasm, to bring what is a Syrian internal affair under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East" — an item devoted fundamentally to seeking a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian State according to well-known international terms of reference — makes us and many others wonder about the decades-long lack of such enthusiasm in attempting to end the Israeli occupation of Arab lands occupied since 1967. However, for us the answer is clear. It is a policy of double standards. It is the dominance of the rule of force over the rule of law. If there is any doubt as to the truth of what we are saying, we would ask why some have used the so-called right of veto 48 times to protect Israeli aggression and occupation, most recently a scant two months ago — a veto that led to the aborting of an international resolution condemning Israeli settlement of occupied Palestinian land.

We expect from the leaders of the members of the Security Council that they encourage further national reform instead of attempting to ignore the path of reform and to sow doubt as to the continuing attempts at reform by my Government — a reform that is ongoing and will continue.

In this context, we find it truly strange to hear the Permanent Representative of the United States of America make unfounded claims, which can in no way be considered serious or legitimate, concerning Syria's alleged exploitation of its special relations with Iran to "repress" Syrian citizens. This surreal, Hollywood-style attempt to link the two countries reflects a lack of respect for the Security Council and its responsibility to protect international peace and security, and clearly reveals the United States Administration's true ill will towards my country. Such designs have no bearing whatsoever on the interests of Syria, its people or its Government.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.